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# North Carolina is for Bicycling



Start with a climate that offers good cycling year-round. Add an excellent network of roads, both urban and rural. Throw in the special bicycle maps, facilities and street improvements provided by state and local governments. Then, round out the formula with an active population of bicyclists—commuters, tourists, racers, mountain bicyclists fitness riders, and around-town cyclists—and it's easy to see why “North Carolina is for Bicycling.”

From the mountains to the sea, bicycling opportunities are unlimited. If you tour, there are thousands of miles of lightly-traveled roads waiting to be explored. To make it easier for you to find your way, the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation has selected and mapped a system of “Bicycling Highways.” Nine routes cover the state, with a route guide for each, which details information on terrain, road condition, available services and points of interest. Maps of local bicycle routes have also been produced. More are in the works. Check the last page of this booklet for a list of publications and resources, and their web links.

As for events, each year there are hundreds of tours, races, festivals, bi- and

triathlons and outings of all kinds. So many, in fact, that the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation publishes a yearly online calendar to help you keep track. Sponsored by the fifty-or-so bicycle clubs and organizations as well as various community groups, these events draw thousands of participants—from novice riders to internationally-ranked racers.

Governments, too, have begun to address bicyclists' needs. In some places, special signs, bicycle lanes, greenway paths and bicycle parking facilities have been in place for years. More recently, money from the federal government to the Department of Transportation has made providing additional bicycle improvements easier. Across the state, efforts are underway to increase cyclists' safety on the road.

Ultimately, however, your safety is in your own hands. Statistics show that 75% of all bicycle/motor vehicle accidents are the fault of the bicyclist. Learn and obey the traffic laws and practice the safe riding techniques outlined in this booklet. A skilled cyclist, riding responsibly, can enjoy bicycling in North Carolina for years to come.

## You're the Driver of a Vehicle



*As the driver of a vehicle, you've got some important rights and duties. The most important right is to safely use the roads to get where you're going. The most important duty*

*is to ride cooperatively and obey the laws. Riding a bike on the road isn't a game. Cyclists who ignore their duties endanger their right—and the rights of others—to use the roads.*

The following highlighted statutes that apply to the operation of a bicycle are excepted from the *Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina*.

### *What the Law says:* *Bicycles are Vehicles*

"Vehicle: Every device in, upon, or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a highway, excepting devices moved by human power or used exclusively upon fixed rails or tracks; provided, that for the purposes of this Chapter bicycles shall be deemed vehicles and every rider of a bicycle upon a highway shall be subject to the provisions of this Chapter applicable to the driver of a vehicle except those which by their nature can have no application." §20-4.01 (49).

### **Cyclists must stop at stop signs and red lights**

Just like any other drivers, you must stop at stop signs and yield to cross traffic. By the way, "cross traffic" includes any pedestrians crossing the street in the crosswalk.

Red lights also mean stop. And, unless you're turning right, you must wait for the green light. If you find a signal that doesn't change for you, that means it's not responsive to bikes. Contact the local traffic engineers and suggest they install signals that detect bikes. For more information, contact the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation.

### *What the Law says: Stop Signs and Stop Lights*

"When a stop sign has been erected or installed at an intersection, it shall be unlawful for the driver of any vehicle to fail to stop in obedience thereto and yield the right-of-way to vehicles operating on the designated main-traveled or through highway..." §20-158 (b) (1).

"When a steady or strobe beam stoplight is emitting a red light controlling traffic passing through an intersection, an approaching vehicle facing the red light shall come to a stop and shall not enter the intersection. After coming to a complete stop and unless prohibited by an appropriate sign, that approaching vehicle may make a right turn.

b. Any vehicle that turns right under this subdivision shall yield the right-of-way to... Other traffic and pedestrians using the intersection..." §20-158 (b) (2) (a).

Keep in mind that ignoring stop signs and red lights leads to about one of every ten car-bike crashes. It's also one of the biggest complaints motorists have against bicyclists.

### **Cyclists must go with the flow of traffic**

Legally, you must ride on the right with traffic, not against it. There's a lot of confusion about this. Some people believe the law says just the opposite, but pedestrians are the only ones who should travel *against* traffic (and that's on roads without sidewalks see §20-174(d) of the Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina). Riding against traffic has never been legal in the U.S. and—if we're lucky—never will be.

### *What the Law says:* *Which Side of the Road*

"Upon all highways of sufficient width a vehicle shall be driven upon the right half of the highway..." § 20-146 (a).

Nationwide, nearly 1/4 of all car/bike crashes are caused by wrong way riders. They believe that it's safer to ride facing traffic because they can "see the cars coming." It's not safer. Motorists don't look for cross traffic on the wrong side on the road.

### **Cyclists must use lights and reflectors at night**

The law requires at least some sort of headlight and a red rear reflector or tail-light. That's not much and you should consider getting more.

In the United States, nearly half of all cycling deaths involve a cyclist riding at night without lights. In the late 1970's, night-time accidents led to only about 30% of the crashes, so the picture is getting worse, not better. Some researchers say only 3% of all cycling happens after dark, proving just how deadly night-time riding is without the proper equipment.

### *What the Law says: Lights*

"Lamps on Bicycles: Every bicycle shall be equipped with a lighted lamp on the front thereof, visible under normal atmospheric conditions from a distance of at least 300 feet in front of such bicycle, and shall also be equipped with a reflex mirror or lamp on the rear, exhibiting a red light visible under like conditions from a distance of at least 200 feet to the rear of such bicycle, when used at night." §20-129 (e).

### **Slow moving vehicles must keep to the right side**

If you are going slower than the speed limit, you must ride in the right through lane *or* as close to the curb as *practicable*. However, you can move to the left to make a left turn or pass another vehicle going the same direction. What does *practicable* mean?

### *What the Law says:* **Slow Moving Vehicles**

“Upon all highways any vehicle proceeding at less than the legal maximum speed limit shall be driven in the right-hand lane then available for thru traffic, or as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the highway, except when overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction or when preparing for a left turn.” §20-146 (b).

There is no hard and fast definition. In one situation, it might mean two feet; in another, eight feet. Just how close “practicable” is depends on the road, the surface, the traffic, the speed of the rider, and other factors. For example, you can ride far enough to the left to avoid a roadside hazard (like a drain grate, a parked car door, right turning cars or debris).

### **Cars must pass bikers safely**

Motorists must give bicycles enough space when they pass. According to the law, they must allow at least two feet of clearance and not move back to the right until it's safe. At the same time, bicyclists

### *What the Law says:* **Passing and Being Passed**

“(a) The driver of any such vehicle overtaking another vehicle proceeding in the same direction shall pass at least two feet to the left thereof, and shall not again drive to the right side of the highway until safely clear of such overtaken vehicle...”

“(b) Except when overtaking and passing on the right is permitted, the driver of an overtaken vehicle shall give way to the right in favor of the overtaking vehicle while being lawfully overtaken on audible signal and shall not increase the speed of his vehicle until completely passed by the overtaking vehicle.” §20-149.

being passed can't speed up while being passed. And, if the passing motorist honks a horn, the bicyclist must give way to the right.

On two-lane roads, drivers can't legally pass on the crest of a grade or on a curve where they can't see what's coming for 500 feet; nor can they pass where passing is prohibited by signs or markings.

### *What the Law says:* **Making Turns**

“(a) Right Turns. Both the approach for a right turn and a right turn shall be made as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway.

“(b) Left Turns. The driver of a vehicle intending to turn left at any intersection shall approach the intersection in the extreme left-hand lane lawfully available to traffic moving in the direction of travel of that vehicle, and, after entering the intersection, the left turn shall be made so as to leave the intersection in a lane lawfully available to traffic moving in the direction upon the roadway being entered.” § 20-153.

### **Bikes make turns like any other vehicles**

Bicyclists, like other vehicle drivers, should make turns in predictable ways. To make a right turn, move over towards the right edge and signal. To make a left turn, look back, signal, merge towards the left when safe (into a left turn lane, if one is available) and make your turn. This is the standard method.

You can also, if you like, pull to the curb and make your turn like a pedestrian, walking across each street. Which approach you use depends on how skilled you are, the road and the traffic situation.

### *What the Law says:* **Signaling Turns**

“(a) The driver of any vehicle upon a highway or public vehicular area before starting, stopping or turning from a direct line shall first see that such movement can be made in safety...and whenever the operation of any other vehicle may be affected by such movement, shall give a signal as required in this section, plainly visible to the driver of such other vehicle, of the intention to make such movement...”

“(b)...Whenever the signal is given the driver shall indicate his intention to start, stop, or turn by extending the hand and arm from and beyond the left side of the vehicle as hereinafter set forth.

“Left turn—hand and arm horizontal, forefinger pointing.

“Right turn—hand and arm pointed upward.

“Stop—hand and arm pointed downward...” § 20-154 (a) and (b).

### **Cyclists must signal turns with their left hands**

Signaling turns is an important part of sharing the road. It lets others know what you want to do. It's required any time your move could affect another driver.

On the other hand, simply giving a signal doesn't give you the right to turn in front of someone. Your signal is a request, not a demand.

You make a left turn signal by holding your left arm out straight to the side. To signal a right turn, hold out your left arm with the hand pointed up. To signal a stop, hold your left arm out with the hand pointed down.

### **Reckless cycling is just as illegal as reckless driving**

If you get a ticket for “reckless driving” while bicycling, you could be in a lot of trouble. While it's a misdemeanor, the penalty is serious: up to six months in jail

and/or a fine of \$500.00. It's up to the judge to decide what your sentence will be. Is it worth the thrill of flying down the street, ignoring traffic laws and the rights of others?

At the same time, motorists who endanger bicyclists by harassing and dangerous moves could be cited for reckless driving.

### *What the Law says:* **Reckless Driving**

“(a) Any person who drives any vehicle upon a highway or any public vehicular area carelessly and heedlessly in willful or wanton disregard of the rights or safety of others shall be guilty of reckless driving.

“(b) Any person who drives any vehicle upon a highway or any public vehicular area without due caution and circumspection and at a speed or in a manner so as to endanger or be likely to endanger any person or property shall be guilty of reckless driving.

“(d) Reckless driving as defined in subsections (a) and (b) is a class 2 misdemeanor. §20-140.

### **Summary**

While there are other traffic laws that affect bicyclists, these are the laws that are most often misunderstood. In this discussion, we have tried to give both the legal language (shown in shaded area) and a brief explanation of what the laws mean.

If you want to learn more go to the North Carolina General Statutes online. The Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina are all essentially found in Chapter 20 of the North Carolina General Statutes. This chapter can be found at [www.ncleg.net/gascripts/statutes/statutes.toc.pl](http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/statutes/statutes.toc.pl). The laws are subject to change, so check the web site for new laws and proposed legislation. For more information on laws affecting bicyclists, please see the Guide to North Carolina Bicycle and Pedestrian Laws, online at [www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/laws/resources/lawguidebook.html](http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/laws/resources/lawguidebook.html).